

Letter of Support for the Municipal Reforestation Bill (S.452/H.869)

Dear Senator / Representative,

I am writing to express my strong support for the Municipal Reforestation Bill (S.452/H.869). This critical legislation offers a comprehensive plan to restore and expand our urban tree canopy, benefitting not only the environment but the health and well-being of our communities.

As you know, Massachusetts' urban forests are facing significant challenges. The decline in tree cover poses a serious threat, particularly for low-income neighborhoods that already disproportionately suffer from excessive heat and poor air quality.

The Municipal Reforestation Bill offers a solution. By establishing a well-funded program with technical assistance, this bill empowers municipalities to develop customized reforestation plans. These plans will not only increase tree cover but also prioritize planting in areas that need it most – environmental justice communities and heat islands.

The creation of an Urban Forest Advisory Council is particularly commendable. This council's expertise will be invaluable in guiding municipalities and ensuring successful implementation of the program.

The benefits of healthy urban forests are undeniable. Trees provide a multitude of ecosystem services, including cleaner air, reduced stormwater runoff, and lower energy costs. They also contribute to a more livable environment, fostering community pride and even boosting property values.

The Municipal Reforestation Bill is a forward-thinking investment in our future. By restoring and expanding our urban forests, we can create a healthier, more resilient Commonwealth for all.

I urge you to give this important legislation your full support.

Sincerely,

[Your Name]

[Your Address]

Key Components of the Municipal Reforestation Program

Establishes an Urban Forest Advisory Council under the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA) that:

- Includes members with expertise in urban forestry, arboriculture, landscape architecture, ecology, workforce development, green infrastructure, demand-side energy efficiency management, and climate change resilience and mitigation.
- Provides advice and technical assistance to municipalities, tree-planting organizations, municipal arborists, state foresters, gas and electric companies.

Requires each participating municipality to develop a reforestation plan that includes:

- Inventory of the existing tree canopy cover using scientific best practices.
- Location of optimal sites for planting trees to achieve the goals of the program.
- Analysis of current condition of the tree canopy cover in project sites.
- Lists the benefits of preserving and expanding the tree canopy cover for climate mitigation such as energy consumption, heat island effect, and stormwater reduction.
- Plans for long-term maintenance, preservation, and follow-up care.
- Plans for community engagement in planting and maintaining trees, including workforce development programs.
- Other provisions developed by the Urban Forest Advisory Council.

Requires each participating municipality to prioritize projects in the following order:

- First priority to sites with less than 20 percent tree canopy cover, neighborhoods with high levels of particulate pollutants that affect human health, environmental justice neighborhoods and sites that are deemed to be heat islands.
- Second priority to sites with less than 40 percent tree canopy cover.
- Third priority to sites with less than 60 percent canopy cover.

Provides funding from the following sources:

- Funding for the Program from appropriations, bond proceeds, or other funds authorized by the Legislature, as well as funds from public and private sources, including gifts, grants, and donations.
- Funds to be distributed to participating municipalities 3 years after the enactment of the bill.
- Funds based on a formula developed by the Urban Forest Advisory Council in consultation with Secretaries of EEA, DOT, and A & F that includes road mileage, population, number of employed individuals, number of environmental justice criteria, and percent of tree canopy cover of 20 percent or less, with a weighted calculation for this factor.